

# Paraguay



Department of Guairí, Paraguay, 2006. The grave from which the team exhumed the remains believed to belong to Ulpiano Fleitas. *Photo by EAAF.*

In 2006, EAAF conducted three missions to Paraguay to collaborate with the Commission for Truth and Justice. EAAF visited possible burial sites and performed archaeological excavations in search of persons disappeared during the regime of General Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989). The team also made recommendations to the commission on historical research methods and database management.

## BACKGROUND

In May 1954, General Alfredo Stroessner, supported by members of the Colorado Party and the armed forces, orchestrated a military coup in Paraguay which ousted President

Federico Chávez from office. Stroessner served eight consecutive terms over the next 35 years. The Constitution was amended in 1967 and 1977 to allow his reelection and legitimate his mandate.<sup>1</sup> Stroessner's rule was marked by gross human rights violations, including the

persecution, torture, kidnapping, and assassination of dissidents.<sup>2</sup> Stroessner's government also participated in Operation Condor, a covert agreement reached by dictatorial regimes in South America to exchange political prisoners during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>3</sup>



The Commission for Truth and Justice (*Comisión de Verdad y Justicia*, CVJ, below right) works in Paraguay to investigate the history of cases of human rights violations (above right), but also to raise awareness through traveling exhibits (below left) and support local families of victims organizations (above left). *Photos courtesy of Comisión de Verdad y Justicia.*

In 1989, General Andrés Rodríguez, supported by a sector of the armed forces, led a coup that ousted Stroessner. Later that year, Rodríguez ran as the Colorado Party candidate and was elected president. He was replaced by the civilian Juan Carlos Wasmosy in elections in 1993. The new government gradually reestablished civil and political rights.<sup>4</sup> Stroessner fled to Brazil, where he obtained political asylum. However, in 2000, a Paraguayan judge issued an order calling for Stroessner's arrest and extradition to Paraguay.<sup>5</sup> His lawyer contested the order. In August 2006, Stroessner died while in exile in Brazil.<sup>6</sup>

In 1996, the then Army Chief General Lino César Oviedo Silva refused a demotion from his position by President Wasmosy. After several months, he was charged with mutiny, and he was finally convicted while running for President in 1998. His replacement in the elections, Raúl Cubas Grau, won the election for President, and once in office commuted Oviedo's sentence and freed him from prison. In 1999, Vice President Luis María Argaña, a rival of Oviedo's, was assassinated. In the ensuing demonstrations, several protesters were killed by troops reportedly loyal to Oviedo.<sup>7</sup> Cubas resigned his office, and Oviedo

and Cubas fled to Brazil. Both returned to Paraguay voluntarily and were arrested, Cubas in 2002 and Oviedo in 2004.<sup>8</sup> The current President, Nicanor Duarte Frutos, was elected in 2003.

### The Terror Archive

In December 1992, Dr. Martín Almada, a lawyer and ex-political prisoner, and Judge José Fernández, found thousands of case files in a former building of the Intelligence Police of Asunción.<sup>9</sup> The files, which became known as the "Terror Archive," documented part of the repression in the Southern Cone during Operation Condor, including



Paraguay, 2006. Laboratory analysis by team member Darío Olmo and EAAF consultant Mariana Segura on remains exhumed during the team's second mission to Paraguay in 2006. Photo by EAAF.

several thousand cases of arrest, torture, extrajudicial killing, and disappearance.<sup>10</sup> In 1993, with the support of UNESCO, the Supreme Court of Paraguay established the Center for Documentation and Archive for the Defense of Human Rights (CDyA) to develop a database of the archives, preserve the documents, and make the information accessible to the public.<sup>11</sup>

### The Truth and Justice Commission

In June 2004, the government under President Nicanor Duarte Frutos established the Commission for Truth and Justice (CVJ) of Paraguay to investigate human rights violations that occurred from 1954 to 2003, with a special emphasis on the ones taking place during Stroessner's regime. The commission documented over 400 cases of disappearance and extrajudicial execution by state agents between 1954 and 1989.<sup>12</sup> The

CVJ is authorized to work to clarify the fates of those subject to disappearance or extrajudicial executions. Further, the CVJ has formally submitted cases to the Office of the Prosecutor, as there are no amnesty laws in Paraguay for human rights abuses committed during the military dictatorship.<sup>13</sup> Indictments from this office have been slow, however.<sup>14</sup> The mandate of the CVJ was set to expire in August 2006, but was extended for another year in order to continue investigations.

### EAAF Participation

EAAF has conducted six missions to Paraguay since 1993, providing technical assistance in the search for the disappeared, and examining the Terror Archive to gather information on the disappearance of Argentine citizens in Paraguay and of Paraguayan citizens in Argentina.

In 2006, with support of the Argentine

Fund for Bilateral Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (FO-AR), EAAF traveled to Paraguay three times to collaborate with the CVJ. On two occasions, the delegation included representatives of the Argentine government's Human Rights Office.

### Fleitas and Servin Cases

#### *First 2006 Mission*

Between April 14 and 21, 2006, EAAF members Daniel Bustamante and Darío Olmo traveled to Asunción to continue cooperation with the CVJ. Also part of the delegation were Javier Mariezcurrena and Jorge Condomí, from the National Secretary of Human Rights.

The team visited two possible exhumation sites in the department of Guairá, about 180 kilometers from Asunción. One was in the town of San Gervasio, and the other in Pasoyoba cemetery.

The team investigated possible burial site for the remains of Ulpiano Fleitas at the cemetery of Pasoyoba. A member of the Agrarian Leagues, which involved the cooperation of priests and farmers in defense of land rights, Fleitas was allegedly executed in 1980 by agents of the Stroessner regime after being held in the clandestine detention center located in Guairá.

The second site, a grave located in a jungle area next to a farm in the rural sector of the town of San Gervasio, in the department of Guairá, was easily identifiable as it had been marked with a cross. The grave was the presumed burial for Eligio Servín, a combatant with the May 14th Movement, an anti-Stroessner armed organization associated with the Paraguayan Liberal Party,

which, according to some sources, was trained and equipped by the Argentine military during democratically-elected President Frondizi's term in office. The group was apparently infiltrated immediately by the Paraguayan Army as they crossed the border and were quickly exterminated in 1960.<sup>15</sup>

The team expressed concerns about skeletal preservation for these cases considering the high levels of acidity present in the soil of the graves, which can severely affect bone conservation.

The team also assisted the CVJ in the areas of historical investigation, database creation, and collection of pre-mortem information.

### Second 2006 Mission

Between August 20 and 25, 2006, EAAF members Darío Olmo and Miguel Nieva, and EAAF consultant Mariana Segura conducted archaeological exhumations on the sites investigated in April 2006. Representatives of the Argentine Secretary of Human Rights also took part in the trip. These were the first exhumations done under

the authority of the CVJ.

First, EAAF carried out an exhumation in search of the remains of Ulpiano Fleitas. EAAF recovered human remains in a poor state of preservation. Given the condition of the bones, compounded by the dearth of testimonies and pre-mortem information on Fleitas, EAAF could neither confirm nor exclude the identification hypothesis via anthropological analysis. In addition, EAAF collected samples for genetic analysis to be conducted at LIDMO, an Argentine genetic laboratory that has previously processed cases for EAAF. Unfortunately, the laboratory could not extract DNA from the samples.

EAAF conducted its second excavation at the site near the town of San Gervasio, where a cross indicated the presumed burial site of Eligio Servín. Servín was allegedly killed in an armed confrontation with the Paraguayan Army in 1960. Since the remains were 45 years old and had been buried in a highly acidic soil, the possibility of deterioration was high. In excavating the site the team found neither human remains nor indication of a grave in the pattern of soil deposition. After expanding the investigated area

outwards, and still observing undisturbed natural soil, the team concluded the search for the burial.

During this mission, EAAF also continued its collaboration with the CVJ on developing guidelines for historical investigation and database design. The team also discussed, with forensic professionals at the Asunción Morgue, the creation of a course on Forensic Anthropology.

### Third 2006 Mission

Between November 26 and December 1, EAAF members Darío Olmo and Daniel Bustamante traveled to Paraguay to continue advising the CVJ on historical investigation and database design. EAAF also visited two suspected burial sites in the town of San Juan Bautista, department of Misiones, in search of the remains of Agrarian League members allegedly killed by security forces in 1976. The sites included an old water well located in what is now the 8th Departmental Police Precinct, and land belonging to the Second Army Corps. In 2007, EAAF conducted archaeological excavations in San Juan Bautista.

## ENDNOTES

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4. Centro de documentación y archivo para la defensa de los derechos humanos. Corte Suprema de Justicia de Paraguay. Asunción. <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/paraguay/historia.html>.
5. Human Rights Watch. *Paraguay: Stroessner Extradition Effort Hailed*. December 2000. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2000/12/11/paragu632.html>.
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8. Amnesty International. 2005. *Amnesty International Report 2005 – Paraguay*. May 25.
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12. Paraguay: ICTJ Activity. <http://www.ictj.org/en/where/region2/596.html>; See also, Benítez Florentín, Juan Manuel. Vice-President of the CVJ. *Comisión de Verdad y Justicia del Paraguay y la lucha antiterrorista*. Hearing of the Eminent Jurists Panel on Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and Human Rights. Buenos Aires. October 31, 2006. <http://ejp.ictj.org/IMG/BenitezFlorentin.pdf>.
13. UN Human Rights Council. 2007. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Manfred Nowak : addendum : mission to Paraguay*. October 1.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Arellano, Diana. 2004. *Movimiento 14 de Mayo para la Liberación del Paraguay*. *Novapolis: Revista de Estudios Políticos Contemporáneos*